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Sikhanyisweni Shelter: report on excavations in the Thukela Basin, Natal, South Africa

by

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ABSTRACT

Excavations at Sikhanyisweni Shelter in the Thukela Basin near Helpmekaar are reported. The deposits at this site date to the early, mid- and late Holocene. The lithic and non-lithic cultural remains and animal and plant residue recovered during excavations are described. In the ensuing discussion, this information is used to elucidate the social structural development of Thukela Basin hunter–gatherer society. It is submitted that between 4000–2000 BP three alliance networks existed in the Thukela Basin, and Sikhanyisweni Shelter's position within this scheme is outlined.

INTRODUCTION

Sikhanyisweni Shelter was excavated as part of a project aimed at documenting and understanding Holocene hunter–gatherer settlement in the Thukela Basin. Excavations were conducted in ten rock shelters in this region between 1981–1984 (Mazel 1984*a b c* 1986*a b* 1987 1988). Sikhanyisweni Shelter itself was excavated between 25 June–16 July 1982, and produced deposits dating to the very early Holocene (ie. 9000–10000 BP) and to the mid- and late Holocene. The early Holocene deposits at this site provide the only unequivocal evidence of human settlement in the Thukela Basin between 7000–10000 BP. Comparison between Sikhanyisweni Shelter's mid- and late Holocene remains with those from other contemporary sites in the Thukela Basin provides important insights into the economic and social structural development of Thukela Basin hunter–gatherer society (Mazel 1987).

Sikhanyisweni Shelter (S 28°28′10″, E 30°23′54″) is situated on the farm Valhalla, immediately west of Helpmekaar (Fig. 1). The Toleni River, a tributary of the Ndaka (Sundays) River is about two kilometres north of the site and is a source of permanent water. The site is at the base of the Sikhanyisweni hill and is partially screened by natural vegetation (Fig. 2). Nevertheless, from inside the rock shelter there is an extensive outlook up and down the Toleni Valley (Fig. 3). The site faces almost due North, and during our stay received sunshine for most of the day. At an altitude of 1 372 m (4 500 ft), Sikhanyisweni Shelter is situated geologically in the Vryheid Formation of the Ecca Group (Geological Map of Southern Africa 1984) and the surrounding vegetation is that of Interior *Acacia karoo–A. nilotica* thornveld of the Valley Vegetation (Edwards 1967). Rock paintings are visible on the shelter wall and their locations are marked on Fig. 4. The paintings comprise mainly human figures (Fig. 5). The rock shelter is 35 mm long, reaches a maximum depth of about 7 m and its height at the centre is 6,5 m.

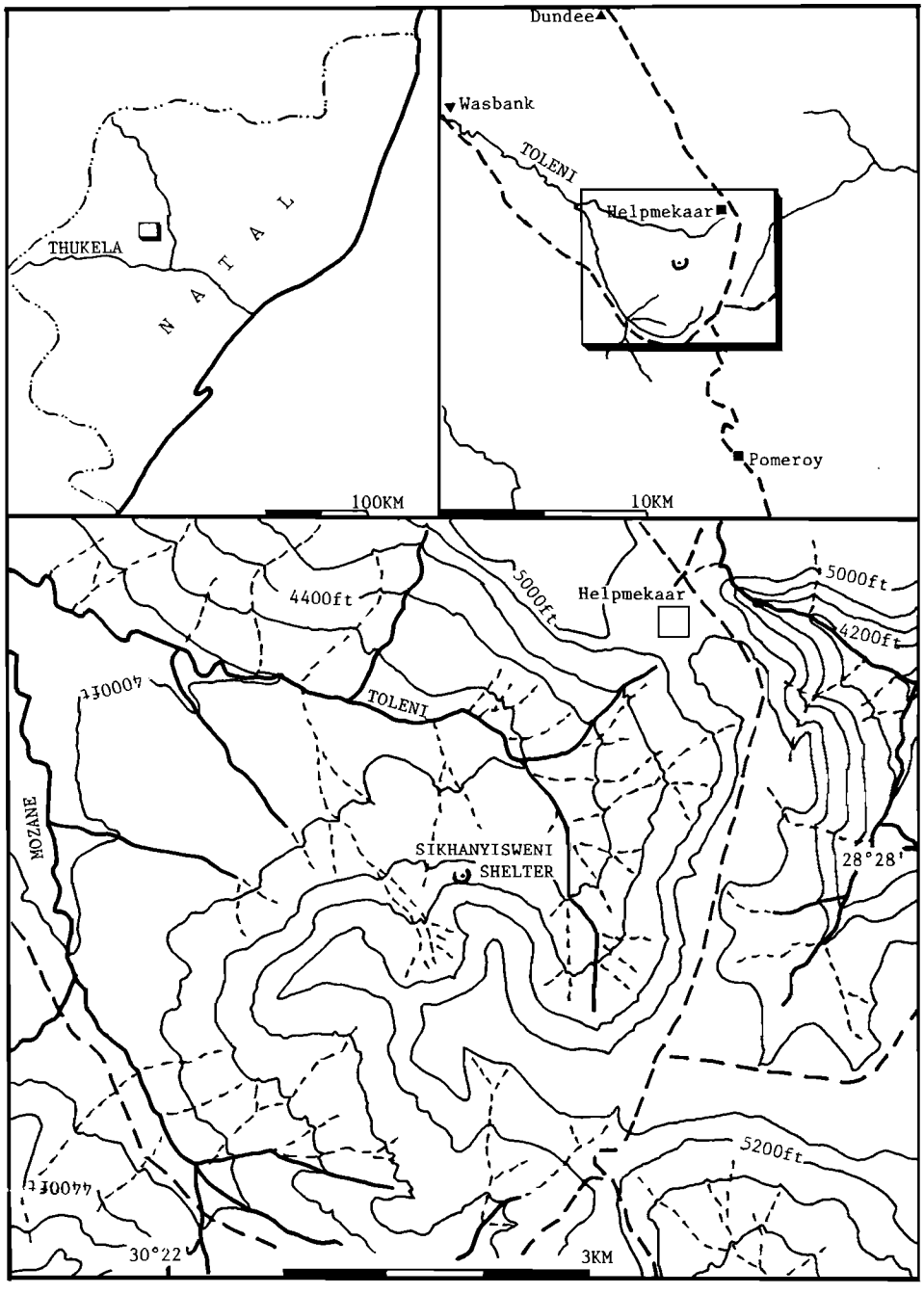

Fig. 1. Location of Sikhanyisweni Shelter.

Fig. 2. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: position of rock shelter at the base of the hill.

Fig. 3. View down the Toleni Valley from Sikhanyisweni Shelter.

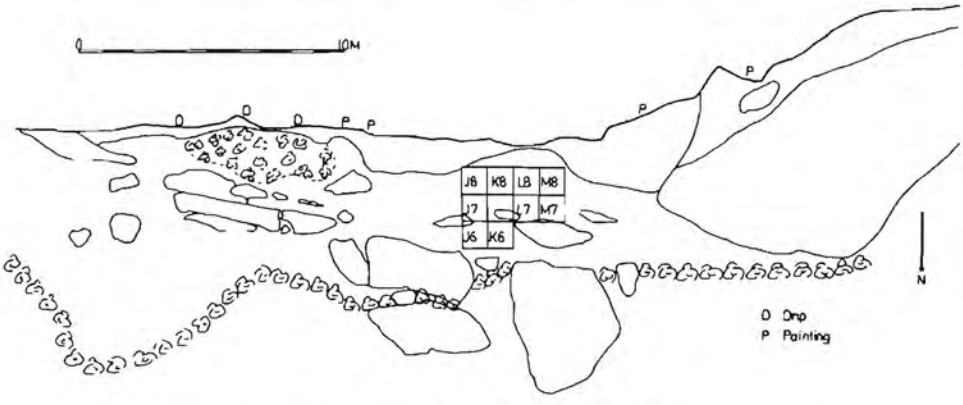

Fig. 4. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: site plan.

Fig. 5. Some of the paintings of humans at Sikhanyisweni Shelter.

Adjacent to Sikhanyisweni Shelter in the same rock band but separated from it by a large boulder is another rock shelter which has pottery and stone artefacts on the surface. This rock shelter probably has some deposit, but its surface deposit is very hard and this is likely, as in the case of Sikhanyisweni Shelter, to characterise the entire deposit.

EXCAVATIONS

Ten square metres were excavated on the west side of the rock shelter (Fig. 4). This area constitutes a relatively small portion of the surface area, but the lack of stratigraphy, the hard nature of the deposit and poor organic preservation argues against further excavations at this site. Bedrock was first reached at about 30 cm below the surface. Bedrock sloped fairly steeply down towards the front of the shelter (Fig. 6) and there is more unexcavated deposit in the 6 and 7 squares, below 70 cm, which was the maximum depth reached. However, as at Nkupe Shelter (Mazel 1988), Mgede Shelter (Mazel 1986*a*) and Diamond 1 (Mazel 1984*c*), I decided to extend the excavation of the upper, richer deposits rather than probe deeper into the very hard and archaeologically poor deposits.

Most of the excavation was done using arbitrary 10 cm spits because much of the deposit, and particularly the lower deposits, showed little natural stratigraphy (Figs 7 & 8). The deposits in front of the large rocks which lie in the 6 and 7 squares (Figs 4 & 6) are softer than those behind them. No roots were noticed during the excavation.

Fig. 6. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: end of the excavation.

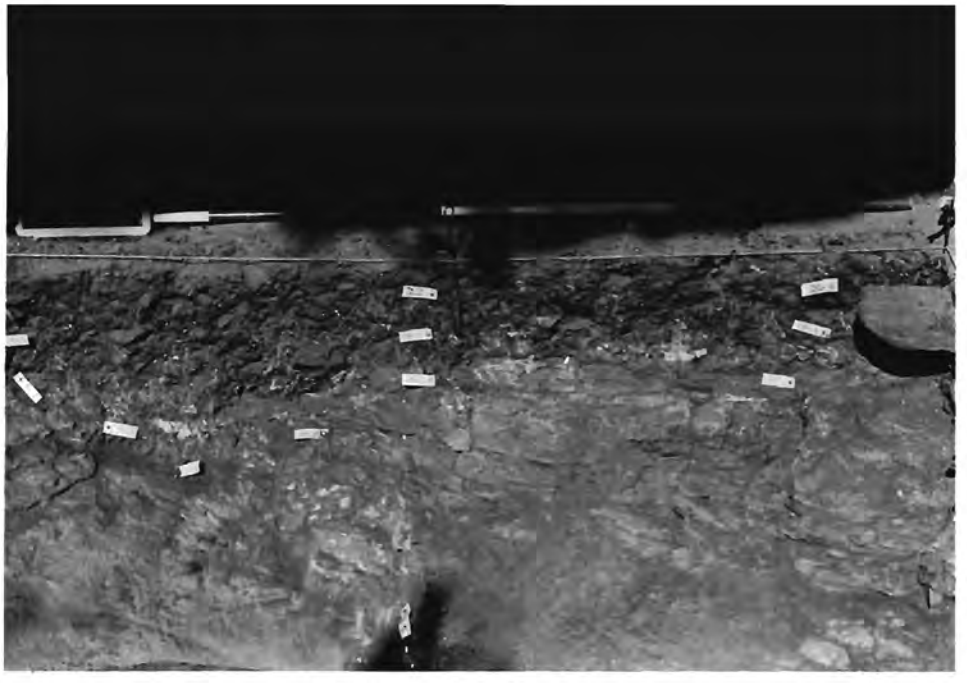

Fig. 7. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: back section.

Fig. 8. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: N7/N8 section (referred to during excavation as M8, M7/N8, N7 section).

Seven layers have been identified (Fig. 9).

Layer 1: comprised six excavated units excluding the thin Surface Cleaning (SC), but one unit, Top Crust (TC), comprised about three-quarters of this layer's deposit. TC occurred in all the squares and was a hard, crusty, light-coloured brown sand. Pale Brown Sand (PBS), excavated only in K6, had the same colour as TC but was noticeably softer. Two ash bodies were removed from Layer 1. Top Ash (TA), excavated in K7 and K6, was a hard, crusted white ash located immediately below SC, and became browner as it merged into the underlying brown deposit. As with TA, Ash Z underlay SC and was a thin, hard and crusted white ash body. The final two units which made up this layer were: firstly, Loose Brown Sand (LBS) which occurred in J6, J7 and K7 and was noticeably softer than TC. Moreover, it contained fine dung which was crusted at its base; and, secondly, a similar but spatially distinct unit, Loose Brown Sand with Dung (LBSD) which overlay TC in K6 and was a loose, fine brown sand which contained much fine and slightly crusty dung.

Some 0,83 m^3 of deposit was removed from this layer.

Layer 2: comprised two components, Crusty Brown Sand 1 (CBS 1) and a white ash body which was divided into two spits, named Ash 1A and Ash 1B. CBS 1 occurred in all nine squares and was generally excavated to a thickness of 10 cm. CBS 1 was a hard, compact, brown sand containing pieces of charcoal and clods of orange ash. CBS 1 in J6 was noticeably softer than in the other squares and had

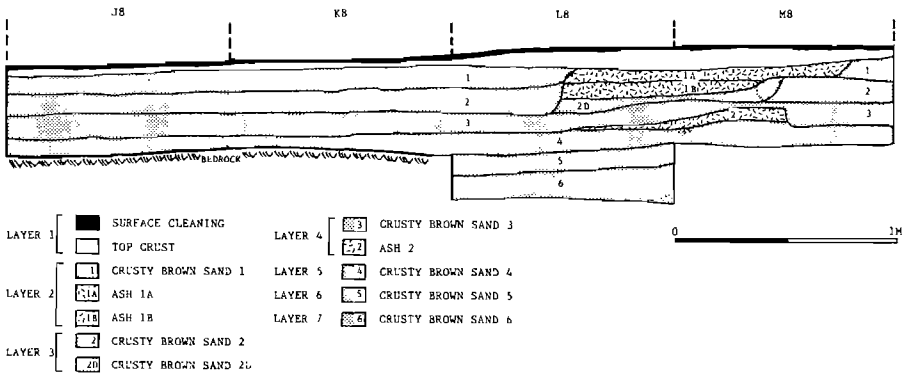

Fig. 9. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: J8/K8/L8/M8 section.

less orange patches. CBS 1 was distinguished from TC (in Layer 1) largely on the basis of the patches of orange which were absent from the latter. The Ash 1 deposits, which were white in colour, varied from being mostly hard to a soft and powdery ash under a very hard surface in M8. A feature of these ash deposits was that they contained little charcoal. A charcoal sample collected *in situ* from across the J7 square and the full thickness of the CBS 1 spit was dated to 3850 ± 60 BP (Pta 3764).

Some 0,81 m^3 of deposit was removed from this layer.

Layer 3: comprised the second 10 cm CBS spit (CBS 2) and a darker crusty brown sand deposit, called CBS 2D, which underlay the Ash 1 deposits in L7, L8 and M8, and was removed to the same base-level as CBS 2 (Figs 9 & 10). As with CBS 1, CBS 2 contained patches of orange sand. In CBS 2, K7 there were small pieces of hardened white ash mixed in with the brown sand deposits, but it was impossible to remove the ash as a distinct entity. In J6 and K6, the base of CBS 2 marked the first appearance of large sub-surface rocks.

Some 0,68 m^3 of deposit was removed from this layer.

Layer 4: comprised the third 10 cm CBS spit, CBS 3, and a small ash body and some fine, loose brown sand found among the rocks in J6 and K6. Bedrock appeared in CBS 3 in the 8 squares and thus in these squares CBS 3 was not always taken to a full 10 cm. The CBS 3 deposit in the 8 squares also hardened towards the back of the rock shelter. CBS 3 occurred in all the squares except J6 and K6 where the deposit among the rocks (mentioned in Layer 3) was a fine, loose brown sand which appeared to be less leached than those deposits behind the large rocks and closer to the back wall (Fig. 6). This deposit, called Brown Sand Amongst Rocks (BSAR), was removed to a 10 cm thickness, but thereafter excavation in these squares was terminated due to the difficulty of working among the rocks. The ash body, called Ash 2, was a localised hard white ash which occurred only in L7 and M7 (Fig. 10). A handpicked charcoal sample from CBS 3, K8 was dated to 9700 ± 100 BP (Pta 3782).

Some 0,56 m^3 of deposit was removed from this layer.

Layer 5: comprised the fourth 10 cm CBS spit, CBS 4, and it was excavated in all

Fig. 10. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: M8/N8 section (referred to during excavation as M7/M8 section).

the squares excluding J6 and K6. CBS 4 was partially underlain by bedrock in all the squares excavated.

Some 0,34 m^3 of deposit was removed from this layer.

Layer 6: comprised the fifth 10 cm CBS spit, CBS 5, and was only excavated in L7 and L8. A charcoal sample collected *in situ* from across the L8 square and from the full thickness of the CBS 5 spit, was dated to 10000 ± 100 BP (Pta 3780).

Some 0,11 m^3 of deposit was removed from this layer.

Layer 7: comprised the sixth CBS spit, CBS 6, which was removed to a maximum thickness of 20 cm in L8.

Some 0,08 m^3 of deposit was removed from this layer.

DATING AND CORRELATION

Layers 2, 4 and 6 have been dated to 3850, 9700 and 10000 BP respectively and these dates pose no problems. The 9700 BP and 10000 BP dates are of particular interest because, as mentioned earlier, they provide the only uneqivocal evidence for the very early Holocene hunter–gatherer occupation of the Thukela Basin. Layer 5 obviously dates to around the same period as probably does Layer 7. Underlying Layer 7 there is more unexcavated deposit, but it is extremely difficult to estimate its thickness and the time period represented by it. The presence of a single potsherd in CBS 1, which is dated to 3850 BP is obviously errant and is probably due to a stratigraphical feature which we are unable to detect because of the lack of natural stratigraphy.

The dating of Layers 1 and 3 pose some problems. The paucity of pottery in Layer 1 suggests that little of the deposit postdates 2000 BP. If we consider the frequency of pottery remains from other Thukela Basin sites, a clear distinction emerges between those sites occupied intensively around and after 2000 BP and those occupied ephemerally. Of the sites known to have been intensively occupied, Mbabane Shelter and eSinhlonhlweni Shelter in the central Thukela Basin produced 240 and 364 sherds respectively, whilst Clarke's Shelter, Driel Shelter and Mgede Shelter in the higher-lying regions produced 82, 119 and 76 sherds respectively. In contrast, Diamond 1, Nkupe Shelter and Gehle Shelter which were probably only ephemerally occupied around and after 2000 BP produced 7, 12 and 12 sherds respectively, and it would seem that Sikhanyisweni Shelter Layer 1 with its eight sherds belongs with this group of sites. There are, however, clear indications that the site was occupied after 2000 BP. The mere presence of pottery is a clear and strong indication of this. Besides pottery, the presence of an ostrich eggshell (OES) bead which has two lines opposite each other reaching from the aperture towards the outer edge and a piece of soapstone probably relate to the post-2000 BP occupation of this site. Beads reflecting this type of wear are known only from other post-2000 BP contexts in the Thukela Basin (Mazel 1986*a* 1987*a*). No soapstone and related material (eg. talc schist) which outcrop in the lower Thukela Basin are known from deposits predating 2000 BP whilst thereafter it is found on early farming sites predating AD 1000 and at the Driel Shelter hunter–gatherer site (Maggs & Ward 1980, Mazel 1987). This has led me to argue that this item postdates 2000 BP at Sikhanyisweni Shelter (Mazel 1987). In summary, it seems most plausible that the majority, and perhaps almost all, of the Layer 1 deposits date to between *ca* 2000 and 3850 BP, with the remainder belonging to an ephemeral post-2000 BP occupation.

Layer 3 dates to somewhere between 3850 and 9700 BP. Close study of the formal tools offers the best insights for assessing its age (Table 1). To begin with, the absence of adzes suggests that it predates 5000 BP, as do the layers without adzes at Gehle Shelter (Mazel 1984*b*) and Nkupe Shelter (Mazel 1988). Among the Layer 3 backed pieces, segments comprise a quarter of the sample and backed points and blades combined about three-fifths. At Nkupe Shelter, which is about 35 km to the northwest, segments comprise about three-quarters of the backed pieces in the 6650 BP deposits but thereafter their proportions drop considerably and in the 5760 BP deposits they comprise just under a third of the backed pieces, closely resembling the Sikhanyisweni Shelter Layer 3 proportions (Mazel 1988). Thus, it seems likely that these deposits are of similar age, and I have elsewhere worked on an age of about 5500 BP for Sikhanyisweni Shelter Layer 3 (Mazel 1987).

CULTURAL ASSEMBLAGES

Stone artefacts

Terminology and definitions used in previous Thukela Basin LSA excavation reports (Mazel 1984*b c* 1986*a b* 1988) apply here and are therefore not restated.

Raw material: The raw material composition of the different artefact categories and the scrapers, adzes and backed pieces is presented in Tables 2 and 3 respec-

tively. Overall, hornfels is overwhelmingly the most abundant raw material, especially in Layers 1–3, and is followed numerically by dolerite and then considerably less, and generally under 4 %, by quartz, quartzite, Cryptocrystalline silicates (CCS) and 'other'. The relatively high CCS proportions in Layers 4 and 5 are of interest and will be discussed in more detail later. Hornfels dominates the formal tool and utilised piece categories to an even greater extent than its overall presence, and excluding the Layer 3 formal tools, comprises over 80 % of these categories. Dolerite is the next best represented raw material in the utilised category and 'other' and quartz in the formal tool category. Half of the dolerite utilised pieces are either hammerstones, rubbers and a reamer and the other half are utilised pieces.

All the adzes recovered were of hornfels, but among the scrapers and especially the backed pieces, where hornfels is still clearly dominant, quartz and CCS are generally better represented than their total representation at this site. Of particular interest, is that all the segments at this site are of CCS or quartz. All the Layer 1 segments are of quartz and in Layers 2 and 3 there are one each of CCS and quartz.

The borers in Layers 1 and 2 and the Layer 1 arrowhead and backed knife are all of hornfels, the Layer 1 unifacially worked piece is of CCS and the Layer 1 bored stone is of quartzite. There is one dolerite ground stone in each of Layers 1 and 3, five schist ground stones in Layer 2, one schist ground stone in each of Layers 3 and 4, and the remaining ground stones are of hornfels.

The total artefact assemblages and backed piece assemblages are presented in Tables 1 and 4 respectively, and a selection of formal tools is illustrated in Figs 11–14.

Waste: Comprises over 98 % of all the layers' artefact assemblages. Chips, chunks and flakes comprise over 98 % of the waste category with the remaining pieces either cores or grindstone fragments.

Utilised pieces: Vary between 0,5–1 % of each layer's total assemblage. Utilised flakes are clearly the most common type in this category, consistently comprising over 80 %. They are followed by pièces esquillées, which in Layers 1 and 2 are between 1–2 % of the utilised pieces, in Layers 3–5 between 10–13 %, 20 % in Layer 6 and absent in Layer 7. Finally, there are a number of rubbers and hammerstones and a reamer which, with the exception of one rubber in Layer 4, are confined to Layers 1 and 2.

Formal tools: No formal tools were recovered from Layer 7 and Layers 4–6 formal tool counts are too low to put much emphasis on them. It is interesting though, that no adzes were recovered from these layers in which the tools were either scrapers or backed pieces. The formal tool pattern in Layers 1–3 of increasing adze and decreasing backed piece proportions (Table 1) is generally consistent with that found elsewhere in the Thukela Basin. Scrapers comprise between 41 % and 53 % of Layers 1–3 formal tools, and against this background adzes increase in proportion from being absent in Layer 3, to 9 % in Layer 2 and 15 % in Layer 1, whilst the reverse characterises the backed pieces which decrease from 36 % in Layer 3, to 19 % in Layer 2 and 18 % in Layer 1. Even though I decided to

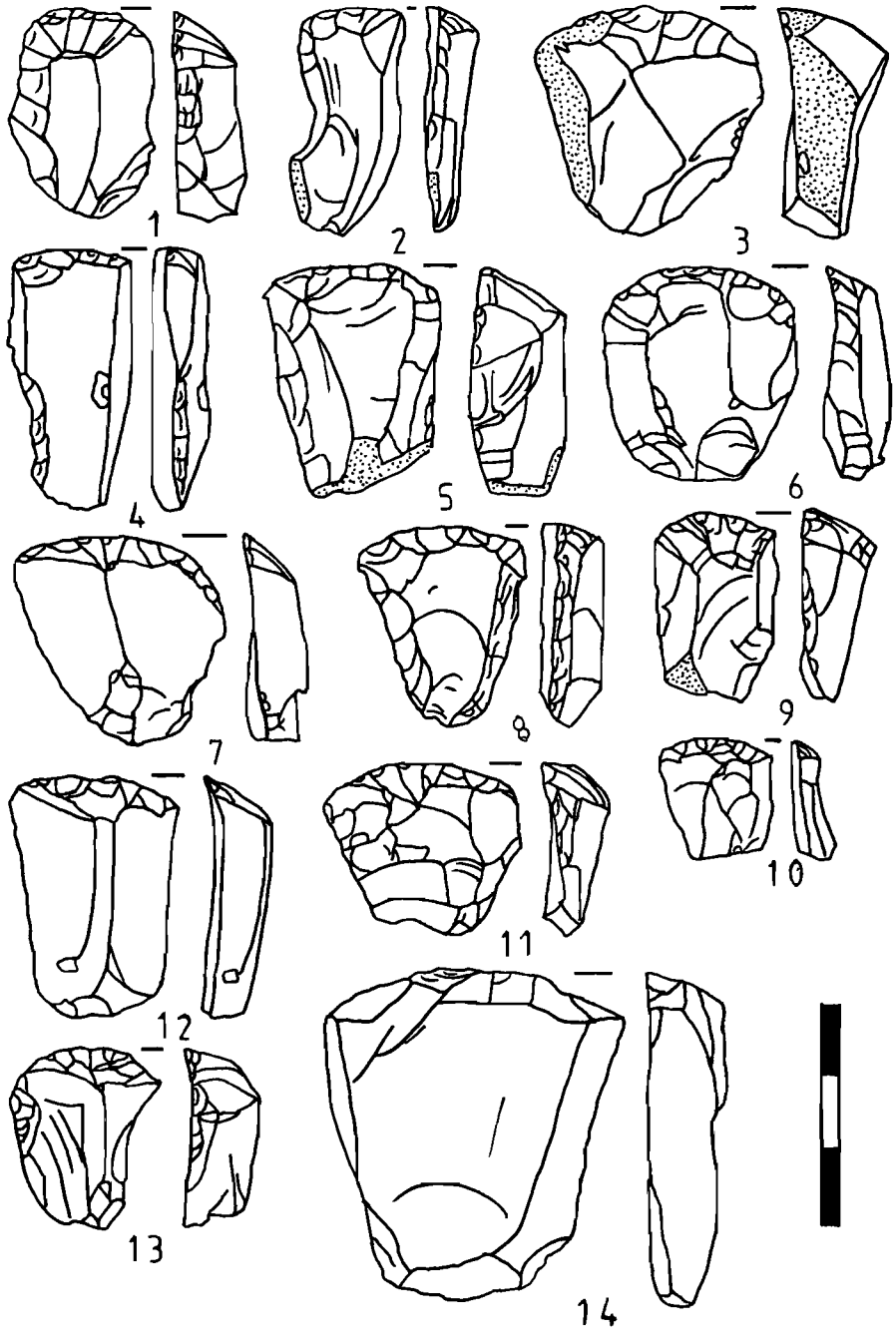

Fig. 11. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: Scrapers. Layer 1, 1–6 and 8–13; Layer 2, 7 & 14. All from hornfels (scale in centimetres).

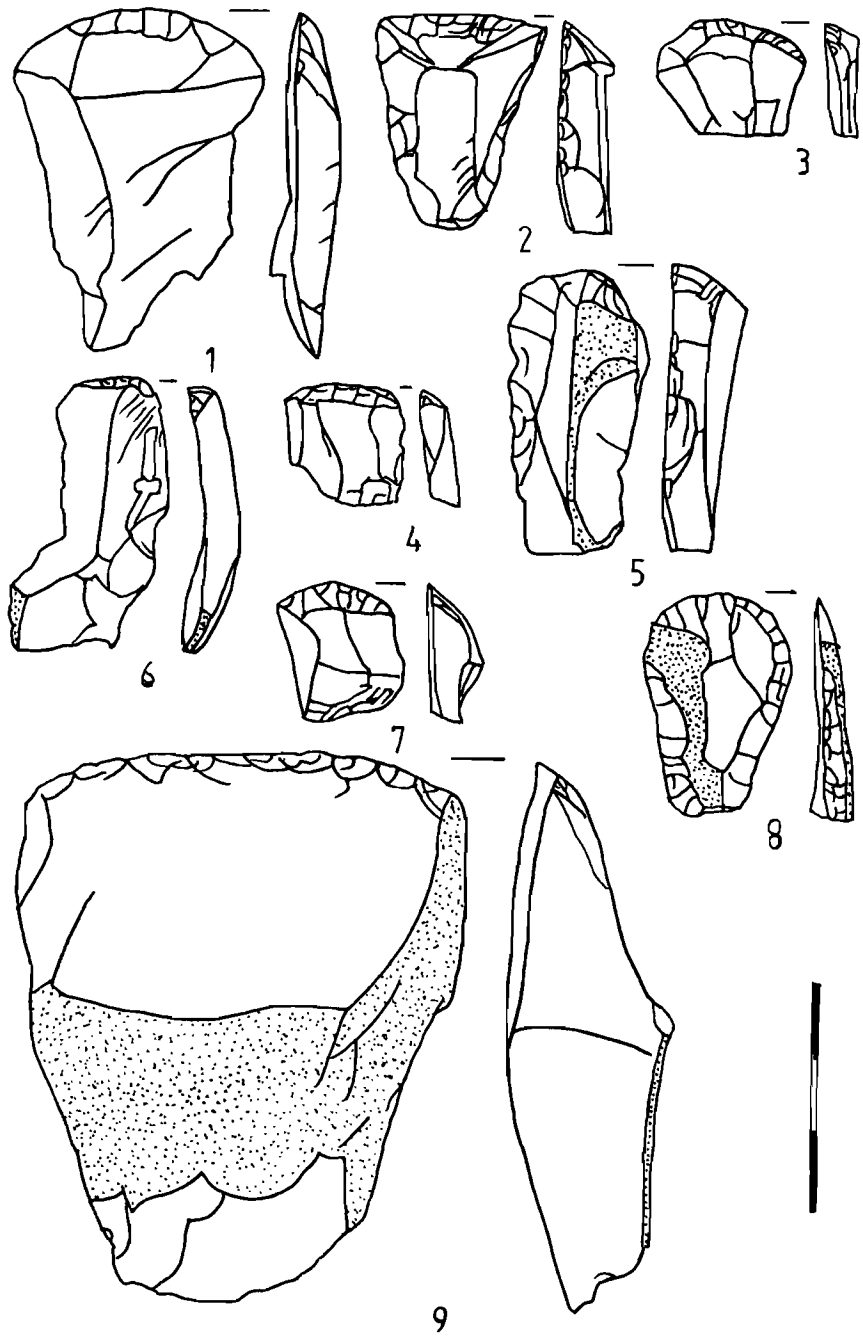

Fig. 12. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: Scrapers. Layer 2, 1–5; Layer 3, 6–8; Layer 4, 9. All from hornfels (scale in centimetres).

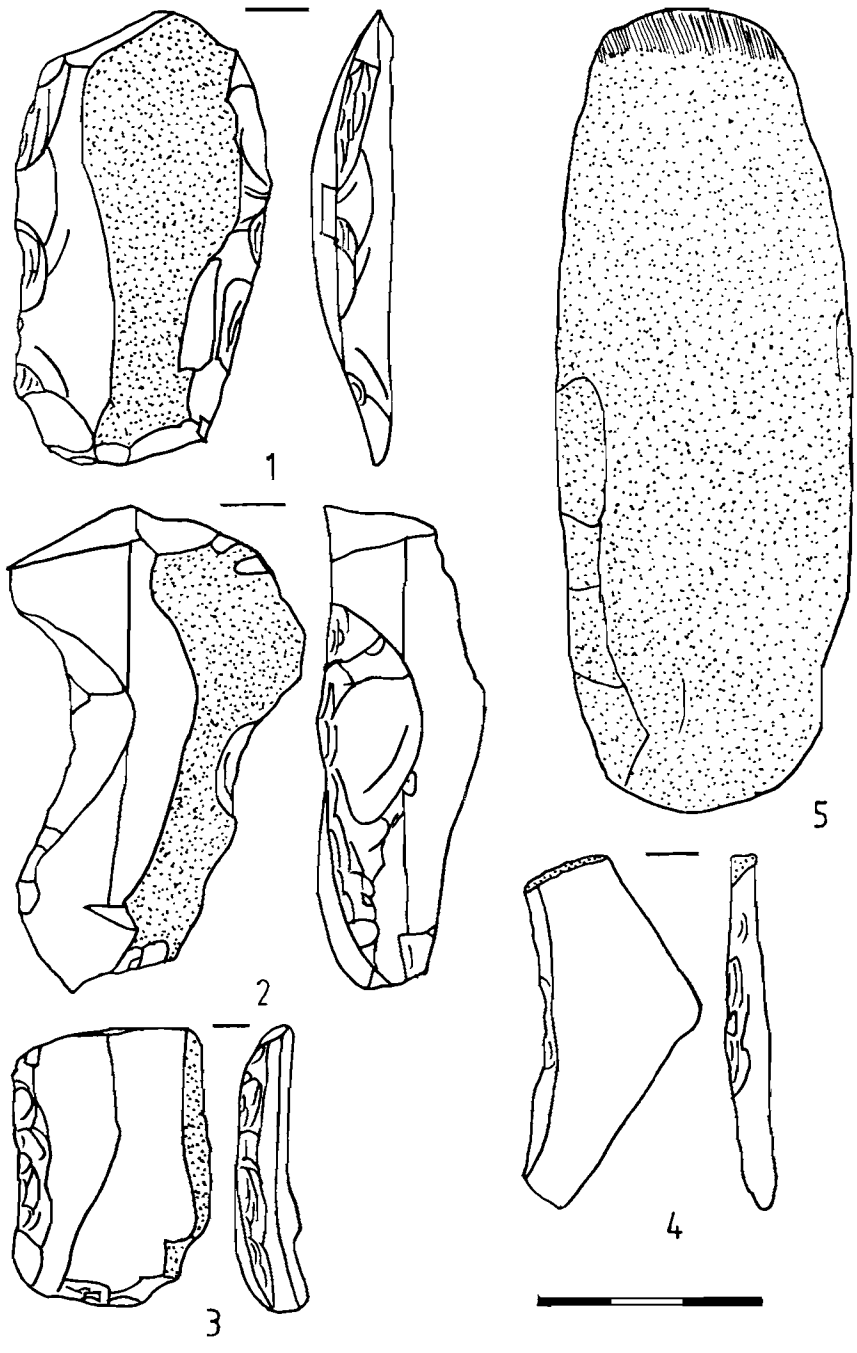

Fig. 13. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: Adzes. Layer 1, 1–4. Ground stone. Layer 3, 5. Adzes are from hornfels and the ground stone from dolerite (scale in centimetres).

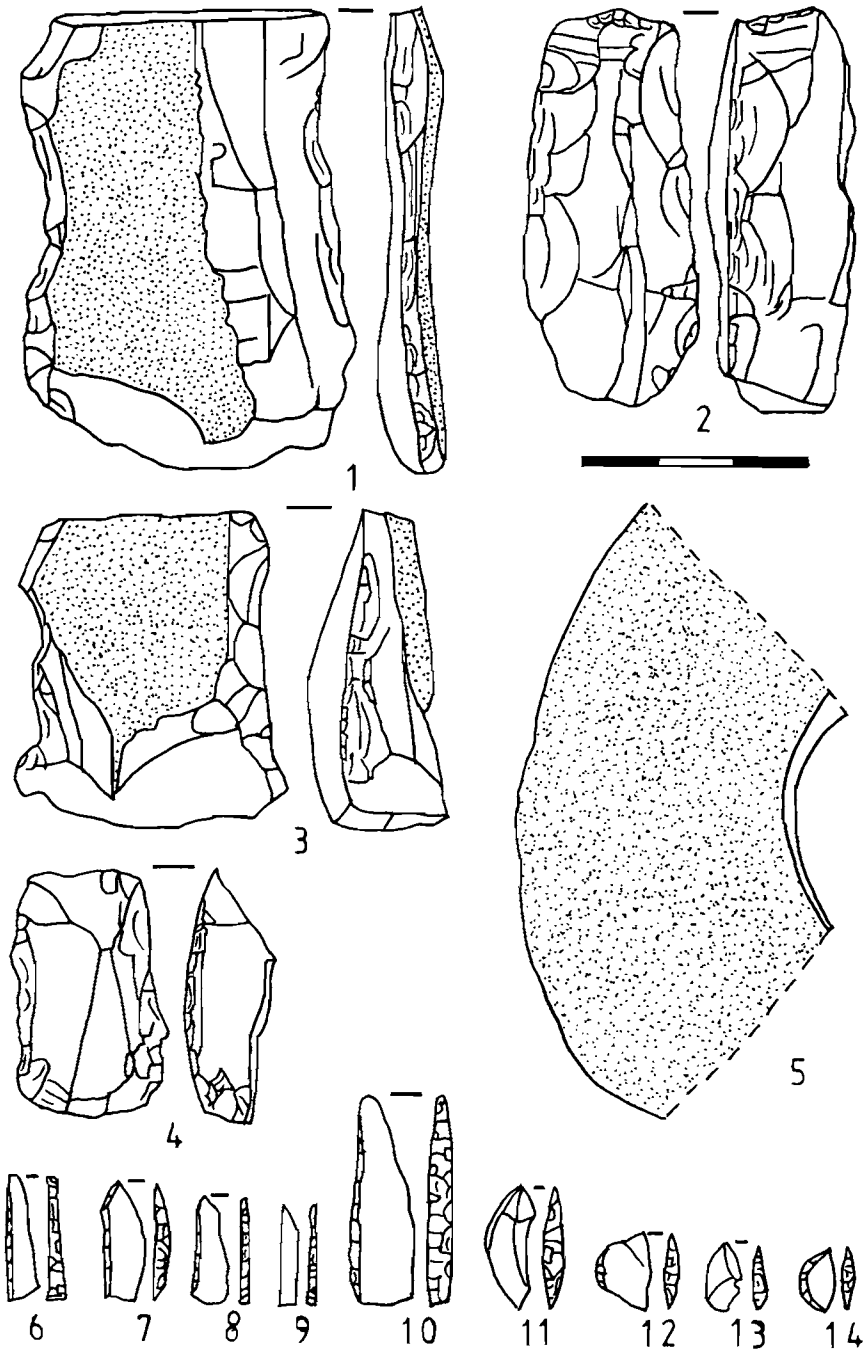

Fig. 14. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: Adzes. Layer 1, 3; Layer 2, 1, 2 & 4. Bored stone. Layer 1, 5. Backed pieces. Layer 1, 10, 12 & 14; Layer 2, 6, 8, 9 & 11; Layer 3, 7 & 13. Backed pieces 6–10 are backed points and 11–14 are segments. All the adzes are from hornfels, the bored stone is from quartzite and backed pieces 6–10 are from hornfels, 11 & 13 are from CCS and 12 & 14 are from quartz (scale in centimetres).

TABLE 1

Sikhanyisweni shelter: stone artefact frequencies.

	Layer 1			Layer 2			Layer 3			Layer 4			Layer 5			Layer 6			Layer 7		
	n	% Category	% Layer Total	n	% Category	% Layer Total	n	% Category	% Layer Total	n	% Category	% Layer Total	n	% Category	% Layer Total	n	% Category	% Layer Total	n	% Category	% Layer Total
Waste																					
Chips, chunks and flakes	16874	99,89		13125	99,88		7041	99,93		3448	99,71		1662	99,94		541	100,00		104	100,00	
Cores	13	0,08		10	0,08		4	0,06		2	0,06		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Grindstone fragments	5	0,03		6	0,04		1	0,01		8	0,23		1	0,06		—	—		—	—	
Total	16892		98,09	13141		98,57	7046		98,87	3458		99,33	1663		99,40	541		98,19	104		99,05
Utilised																					
Piéces esquillées	2	1,57		2	2,04		6	10,34		2	11,11		1	12,50		1	20,00		—	—	
Utilised flakes	120	94,49		95	96,94		52	89,66		15	83,33		7	87,50		4	80,00		1	100,00	
Hammerstones	3	2,36		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Ochre-stained rubber	1	0,79		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Rubber	—	—		1	1,02		—	—		1	5,56		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Reamer	1	0,79		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Total	127		0,74	98		0,74	58		0,81	18		0,52	8		0,48	5		0,91	1		0,95
Formal tools																					
Scrapers	107	52,97		50	53,76		9	40,91		4	66,67		1	50,00		2	40,00		—	—	
Scraper/Adzes	8	3,96		2	2,15		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Backed pieces	36	17,82		18	19,35		8	36,36		—	—		1	50,00		3	60,00		—	—	
Adzes	30	14,85		8	8,60		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Borers	3	1,48		3	3,22		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Ground stone	5	2,47		7	7,53		3	13,64		2	33,33		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Arrowhead	1	0,49		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Unifacially worked	1	0,49		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Bored stone	1	0,49		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Backed knife	1	0,49		—	—	—	—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Miscellaneous retouched pieces	9	4,46		5	5,38		2	9,09		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—	
Total	202		1,17	93		0,70	22		0,31	6		0,17	2		0,12	5		0,91	—		
Layer total	17221			13332			7126			3482			1673			551			105		

TABLE 2

Sikhanyisweni shelter: raw material composition of the different artefact categories.

Layer	Quartz		Quartzite		Hornfels		CCS		Dolerite		'Other'		Total
Layer	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
1	539	3,19	12	0,07	14704	87,05	70	0,41	1566	9,27	1	0,01	16892
2	174	1,32	79	0,60	11167	84,98	31	0,24	1690	12,86	—	—	13141
3	106	1,50	177	2,51	5452	77,78	42	0,60	1269	18,01	—	—	7046
4	41	1,19	121	3,50	2114	61,13	212	6,13	970	28,05	—	—	3458
5	22	1,32	2	0,12	967	58,15	91	5,47	581	34,94	—	—	1663
6	19	3,51	1	0,18	374	69,13	—	—	147	27,17	—	—	541
7	3	2,88	—	—	68	65,38	—	—	33	31,73	—	—	104
						Utilised							
1	1	0,79	—	—	120	94,49	—	—	6	4,72	—	—	127
2	2	2,04	—	—	89	90,82	—	—	7	7,14	—	—	98
3	1	1,72	—	—	54	93,10	—	—	3	5,17	—	—	58
4	—	—	—	—	15	83,33	1	5,56	2	11,11	—	—	18
5	—	—	—	—	7	87,50	—	—	1	12,50	—	—	8
6	1	20,00	—	—	4	80,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	5
7	—	—	—	—	1	100,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
						Formal							
1	6	2,97	2	0,99	191	94,55	2	0,99	1	0,50	—	—	202
2	2	2,15	—	—	84	90,32	1	1,08	1	1,08	5	5,38	93
3	1	4,55	—	—	16	72,73	2	9,09	2	9,09	1	4,55	22
4	—	—	—	—	5	83,33	—	—	—	—	1	16,67	6
5	—	—	—	—	2	100,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
6	—	—	—	—	5	100,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	5
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
						Total Layer							
1	546	3,17	14	0,08	15015	87,19	72	0,42	1573	9,13	1	0,01	17221
2	178	1,34	79	0,59	11340	85,06	32	0,24	1698	12,74	5	0,04	13332
3	108	1,52	177	2,48	5522	77,49	44	0,62	1274	17,88	1	0,01	7126
4	41	1,18	121	3,48	2134	61,29	213	6,12	972	27,91	1	0,03	3482
5	22	1,32	2	0,12	976	58,34	91	5,44	582	34,79	—	—	1673
6	20	3,63	1	0,18	383	69,51	—	—	147	26,68	—	—	551
7	3	2,86	—	—	69	65,71	—	—	33	31,43	—	—	105

combine SC with underlying deposits to form Layer 1, it is nevertheless of interest to contrast the composition of the SC formal tools (n = 35) with that of the rest of Layer 1. What we see is a continuation of the pattern outlined above—scrapers are 43 % of the SC formal tools and 55 % of the rest, but adzes are 31 % of the SC formal tools and only 11 % of the rest, whilst backed pieces are 11 % of the SC formal tools and 19 % of the rest.

Besides scrapers, adzes, backed pieces and miscellaneous retouched pieces, which vary between 4–9 % of the formal tools, the only other formal tools relatively well represented are ground stones, which decrease in proportion through time (Table 1). Borers and scraper/adzes occur in Layers 1 and 2, but do not exceed 4 % of the formal tools. The remaining formal tool types recovered (ie. arrowhead, unifacial worked piece, backed knife and bored stone) occur only in Layer 1 and each comprises less than 1 % of this layer's formal tools.

Among the backed pieces (Table 4), segment proportions decrease and this correlates with an increase in miscellaneous backed pieces. Combined backed points and blades comprise 63 % of the Layer 3 backed pieces and in Layers 1 and 2 are 42 % and 43 % respectively.

TABLE 3

Sikhanyisweni shelter: raw material composition of the scrapers, adzes and backed pieces.

Layer	Quartz n	Quartz %	Quartzite n	Quartzite %	Hornfels n	Hornfels %	CCS n	CCS %	Dolerite n	Dolerite %	Total
					Scrapers						
1	2	1,87	1	0,93	103	96,26	1	0,93	—	—	107
2	1	2,00	—	—	48	96,00	—	—	1	2,00	50
3	—	—	—	—	8	88,89	—	—	1	11,11	9
4	—	—	—	—	4	100,00	—	—	—	—	4
5	—	—	—	—	1	100,00	—	—	—	—	1
6	—	—	—	—	2	100,00	—	—	—	—	2
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
					Adzes						
1	—	—	—	—	30	100,00	—	—	—	—	30
2	—	—	—	—	8	100,00	—	—	—	—	8
3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
					Backed Pieces						
1	4	11,11	—	—	32	88,89	—	—	—	—	36
2	1	5,56	—	—	16	88,89	1	5,56	—	—	18
3	1	12,50	—	—	5	62,50	2	25,00	—	—	8
4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	—	—	—	1	100,00	—	—	—	—	1
6	—	—	—	—	3	100,00	—	—	—	—	3
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

TABLE 4

Sikhanyisweni shelter: backed piece assemblage.

Layer	Backed points n	Backed points %	Backed blades n	Backed blades %	Segments n	Segments %	Miscellaneous backed n	Miscellaneous backed %	Total
1	6	16,67	9	25,00	3	8,33	18	50,00	36
2	7	38,89	1	5,56	2	11,11	8	44,44	18
3	3	37,50	2	25,00	2	25,00	1	12,50	8
4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	1	100,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
6	—	—	2	66,67	1	33,33	—	—	3
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Backed scrapers occur primarily in Layers 1–3 with only one in each of Layers 4 and 6 (Table 5). About 20 % of the Layers 2 and 3 scrapers are backed, whilst close on 40 % of the Layer 1 scrapers are backed. Both the Layer 3 backed scrapers are backed along two laterals perpendicular to the working edge and this type of backed scraper comprises about three-fifths of the backed scrapers in Layers 1 and 2. Scrapers backed along one lateral perpendicular to the working edge are next most popular in Layers 1 (20 %) and 2 (40 %). Other than these backed scrapers, there is one scraper backed across from the working edge in

TABLE 5

Sikhanyisweni shelter: frequency and nature of backed scrapers. Type 1 scrapers backed across from working edge, Type 2 backed along one lateral perpendicular to working edge, Type 3 backed along two laterals perpendicular to working edge, Type 4 backed across from working edge and along one lateral perpendicular to working edge, Type 5 backed across from working edge and along two laterals perpendicular to working edge.

	Type of Backing										Total	Total	%
	1		2		3		4		5		Backed	Scrapers	Backed
Layer	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
1	—	—	16	40,00	23	57,50	1	2,50	—	—	40	107	37,38
2	1	10,00	2	20,00	6	60,00	—	—	1	10,00	10	50	20,00
3	—	—	—	—	2	100,00	—	—	—	—	2	9	22,22
4	—	—	1	100,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	4	25,00
5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
6	—	—	1	100,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	50,00
7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

TABLE 6

Sikhanyisweni shelter: frequency of the number of notches per adze. Only layers 1 and 2 contained adzes.

	Number of Notches				
	1		2		
Layer	n	%	n	%	Total
1	24	80,00	6	20,00	30
2	3	37,50	5	62,50	8

Layer 2, one scraper backed across from the working edge and also along two laterals perpendicular to the working edge in Layer 2, and, finally, one scraper backed across from the working edge and along one lateral perpendicular to the working edge in Layer 1.

Most of the adzes in Layer 2, where adzes are poorly represented, have two notches, whilst in Layer 1, where adzes are better represented, most of the adzes have only one notch (Table 6).

Scrapers and adzes were analysed metrically, but only the scraper results for Layers 1–3 and adze results for Layers 1 and 2 are presented because the samples in the other layers were negligible. No raw material distinctions have been made because all the adzes are of hornfels and all but two of the scrapers measured in Layer 1 and one in each of Layers 2 and 3 are of hornfels.

The scraper mean lengths, widths, heights and width/length ratios display similar patterning (Fig. 15); all the Layer 2 mean dimensions are greater than those in Layers 1 and 3. The Layer 1 and 3 scraper mean lengths and heights are similar but their mean widths are different, with the Layer 3 mean width considerably greater. Regarding the W/L ratios, the scrapers in Layers 1 and 3 are more elongate than those in Layer 2, where the mean widths and lengths are the same (34 mm).

The adze mean heights in Layers 1 and 2 are essentially the same, but the Layer 1 mean length is less than that in Layer 2 and the reverse applies to mean width

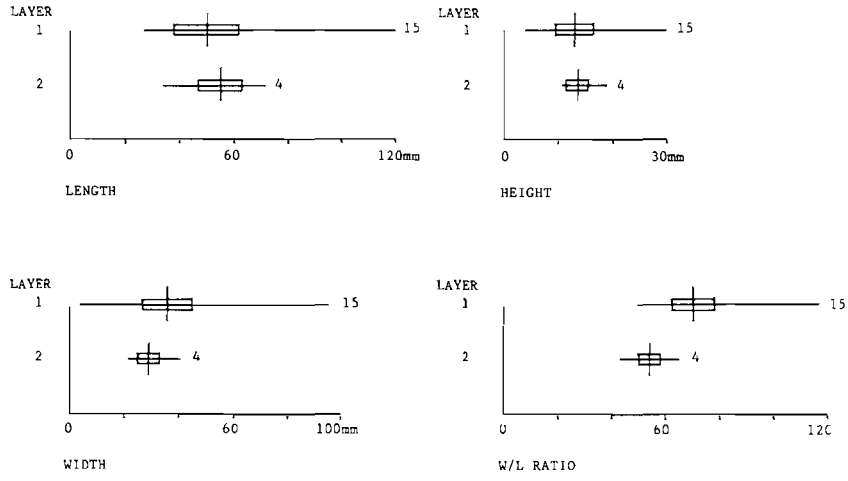

Fig. 15. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: Dice-Leraas diagram of scraper dimensions.

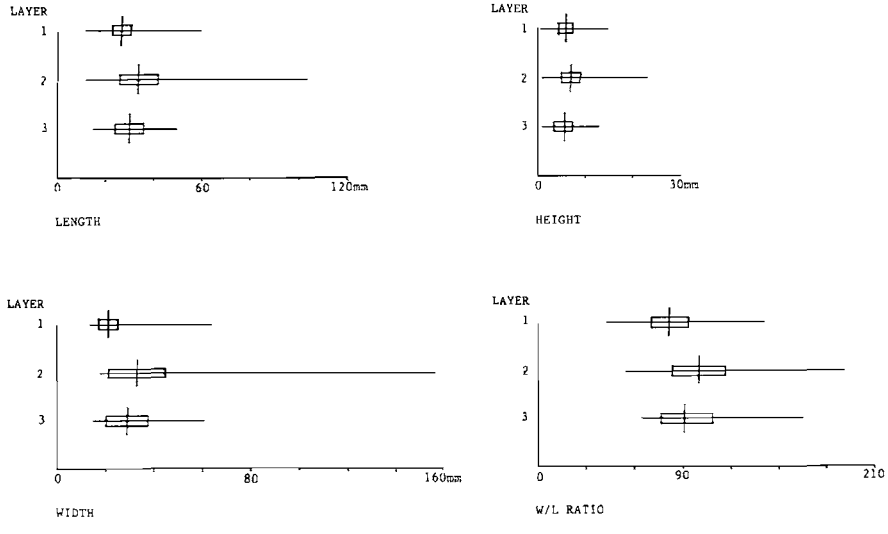

Fig. 16. Sikhanyisweni Shelter: Dice-Leraas diagram of adze dimensions.

(Fig 16). Predictably, this has resulted in contrasting W/L ratios, with the Layer 2 adzes being more elongate than those in Layer 1.

The mean notch depth of the Layer 1 adzes is 1,79 mm (n = 21; SD = 1,91 mm) and the mean notch widths in Layers 1 and 2 are 27,1 mm (n = 21; SD = 14,50 mm) and 32,67 mm (n = 6; SD = 7,71 mm) respectively. I was unable to calibrate the Layer 2 mean notch depth because only two of the adzes in this layer had concave working edges. Of the rest, two were straight and one was slightly convex, protruding 1 mm.

Ochre and Iron Ore

Ochre was recovered from all seven layers in the following quantities: Layer 1—1 267 pieces; Layer 2—953 pieces; Layer 3—475 pieces; Layer 4—513 pieces; Layer 5—535 pieces; Layer 6—190 pieces; and Layer 7—6 pieces. None of the ochre was ground, but an ochre-stained rubber recovered from Layer 1 provides evidence of ochre working. Two pieces of iron ore were recovered from Layer 1 and three pieces from Layer 2.

Pottery

After Diamond 1, which has only seven sherds (Mazel 1984*c*), Sikhanyisweni Shelter produced the smallest pottery assemblage of all the Thukela Basin sites, containing only eight sherds. Seven of the Sikhanyisweni Shelter sherds were recovered from Layer 1 and one from Layer 2 (Table 7). As Layer 2 is dated to 3850 BP the sherd recovered from it is considered errant (see earlier discussion). All the Layer 1 sherds had grey cores and the Layer 2 sherd had an orange core. Three of the Layer 1 sherds were burnished. The mean thickness of the Layer 1 sherds is 9 mm (n = 7; SD = 3,51 mm).

TABLE 7

Sikhanyisweni shelter: pottery assemblage.

Layer	Thickness (mm)	Colour	Burnish
1	4	grey	ordinary
	4	grey	—
	10	grey	red
	10	grey	—
	12	grey	black
	12	grey	—
	11	grey	—
2	16	orange	—

TABLE 8

Sikhanyisweni shelter: worked bone assemblage.

	Layer													
	1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Points, broken	3	21,43	1	10,00	4	40,00	1	33,33	—	—	—	—	—	—
Points/Linkshafts, broken	1	7,14	—	—	1	10,00	—	—	1	50,00	—	—	—	—
Awl, broken	2	14,29	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	50,00	—	—	—	—
Bone flakes	1	7,14	1	10,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Misc. worked bone	1	7,14	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	66,67	—	—
Scraper	—	—	1	10,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Utilised	—	—	1	10,00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Spatula, flat, broken	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	33,33	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fragment of points, Linkshafts or Awls	6	42,86	6	60,00	5	50,00	1	33,33	—	—	1	33,33	—	—
Total	14		10		10		3		2		3		—	

Worked bone

Worked bone was recovered from Layers 1–6 (Table 8). The major component of the worked bone assemblages are adiagnostic fragments of points/linkshafts and possibly awls. Among the diagnostic types, points and linkshafts are best represented with no other types consistently represented. Awls occur in Layers 1 and 5; there is a spatula in Layer 4 and a bone scraper in Layer 2.

OES pieces and beads

OES pieces were recovered from Layers 1–5 (Table 9). None of the OES was ground or decorated but three pieces in Layer 1 were perforated. These, together with the two incomplete beads in Layer 1, provide evidence for bead manufacture at Sikhanyisweni Shelter.

Beads were recovered from Layers 1 (n = 21) and 2 (n = 11), and all but one bone bead from Layer 1 were of OES. As mentioned earlier, two incomplete beads were recovered from Layer 1. The Layer 1 bone bead had ochre staining, and an OES bead in Layer 1 displayed two wear lines opposite each other reaching from the aperture toward the outer edges. The OES beads vary in maximum diameter between 3 and 7 mm but the majority are either 4 or 5 mm. The mean maximum diameters of the Layers 1 and 2 beads are 4,45 mm (n = 11; SD = 1,44 mm) and 4,59 mm (n = 17; SD = 1,06 mm) respectively.

TABLE 9

Sikhanyisweni shelter: OES pieces assemblage.

Layer	OES pieces					
	Burnt		Unburnt		Total	
	n	g	n	g	n	g
1	27	5,6	31	11,3	58	16,9
2	39	11,5	92	35,3	131	46,8
3	23	8,8	28	12,4	51	21,2
4	23	5,4	6	2,7	29	8,1
5	4	0,4	—	—	4	0,4
6	—	—	—	—	—	—
7	—	—	—	—	—	—

Other cultural finds

A piece of barbed wire was recovered from SC in Layer 1 and probably postdates AD 1880. One piece of glass was recovered from each of Layers 1 and 2 and a small piece of soapstone was recovered from Layer 1. Three *Nassarius kraussianus* shells were recovered from Layer 1.

FAUNA

Sikhanyisweni Shelter produced a relatively large macrofaunal assemblage (Table 10). In the following discussion of this assemblage, Layers 4–6 are combined to allow them to be compared with the overlying layers. Layers 4 and 6 date to 9700 and 10000 BP respectively and thus essentially belong to the same period. No microfaunal remains were recovered from this site. I submit that this is prob-

TABLE 10

Sikhanyisweni shelter: macrofaunal assemblage (*represented by phalanges).

	Layer						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Leporidae (2 spp.), hares	6/1	26/4	4/1	10/2	1/1	2/1	—
Hystrix africaeaustralis, porcupine	1/1	1/1	—	—	—	—	—
Phataginus temmincki, pangolin	2/1	9/1	—	—	—	—	—
Papio ursinus, baboon	9/1	37/2	13/1	3/1	—	—	—
Canis mesomelas, black-backed jackal	4/1	3/1	—	—	—	—	—
Lycaon pictus, hunting dog	—	1/1	—	—	—	—	—
Herpestes sanguineus, slender mongoose	1/1	1/1	—	—	—	—	—
Felis libyca, wildcat	1/1	4/1	2/1	—	—	—	—
Panthera pardus, leopard	—	2/1	—	—	—	—	—
Orycteropus afer, aardvark	1/1	1/1	—	—	—	—	—
Procavia capensis, rock hyrax	29/4	34/4	4/2	8/1	4/1	—	—
Equus cf. *burchelli*, zebra	2/1	8/2	6/1	22/3	16/2	1/1	—
Hippopotamus amphibius, hippopotamus	—	1/1	—	—	—	—	—
Phacochoerus aethiopicus, bushpig	4/1	3/1	—	4/1	5/1	—	—
Potamochoerus porcus, warthog	1/1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Suidae—general, bushpig and warthog	16/1	26/2	10/1	9/1	11/1	1/1	—
Taurotragus oryx, eland	—	—	1/1	—	—	—	—
Tragelaphus scriptus, bushbuck	—	1/1	—	—	—	—	—
Redunca fulvorufula, mountain reedbuck	3/1	3/1	1/1	—	—	—	—
Hippotragus sp. roan/sable	4/1	—	—	—	—	1/1	—
cf. *Connochaetes gnou*, wildebeest	4/1	7/1	2/1	2/1	—	1/1	—
Cephalophus monticola, blue duiker	3/1	2/1	—	—	—	—	—
Ourebia ourebi, oribi	3/1	3/1	—	—	—	—	—
Oreotragus oreotragus, klipspringer	*	*	1/1	—	—	—	—
Raphicerus cf. *campstris*, steenbok	—	1/1	—	1/1	—	—	—
Syncerus caffer, buffalo	—	—	1/1	—	—	—	—
Bovini gen. et sp. indet., cattle/buffalo	—	1/1	—	—	—	—	—
Bovidae—general							
small	59/3	147/5	19/7	22/1	6/1	1/1	—
small medium	64/3	124/4	22/1	11/2	4/1	1/1	—
large medium	38/1	115/2	27/1	13/1	2/1	2/1	—
large	3/1	12/1	6/1	1/1	—	—	—

ably due to poor organic preservation rather than the animals not being present in the deposits to begin with. Two indeterminate fish vertebrae were recovered from Layer 2.

As with the other Thukela Basin hunter–gatherer sites (Maggs & Ward 1980, Mazel 1984*b c* 1986*a b* 1988), the most common animals represented are bovids, which comprise either 44 % or 45 % of Layers 1, 2 and 4–6 Minimum Number of Individuals (MNIs) and 68 % of the Layer 3 MNIs. Among the bovids, small and small/medium types are most common, comprising between 67–78 % of Layers 1–3 bovids, but significantly less of the Layers 4–6 bovids, only 53 %. Among the smaller bovids, mountain reedbuck, oribi and steenbok are most common, while eland, roan/sable, wildebeest and buffalo were individually identified among the larger bovids. The identification of an eland in Layer 3 is of special interest, because it and two other eland identified in the post-2000 BP deposits at Driel Shelter (Maggs & Ward 1980), are the only eland positively identified from the Thukela Basin hunter–gatherer sites.

The next largest group of animals represented are dassies and hares combined. In Layers 4–6 they comprise 18 % of the MNIs, in Layer 3 they are less (14 %), but thereafter they increase to 18 % and 17 % in Layers 2 and 1 respectively.

Carnivores occur in Layers 1–3, comprising 7 %, 9 % and 5 % of these layers' MNIs respectively. Elsewhere, I have considered the implications of carnivore remains in the Thukela Basin hunter–gatherer sites, and especially whether they may have been responsible for some of the macrofaunal remains recovered (Mazel 1987 1988). I tentatively submitted that the presence of carnivores in these deposits could partly be related to their being human prey, both for food and their skins. As all the Thukela Basin sites excavated produced large cultural assemblages, and the carnivore proportions at these sites were generally low, I concluded that humans were primarily responsible for the macrofaunal assemblages and thus the patterns reflected in them.

Pigs (ie. warthogs and bushpigs) occur most commonly in Layers 4–6 (15 %), but are poorly represented in Layer 3 (5 %), increasing thereafter to 7 % and 10 % in Layers 2 and 1 respectively.

Zebra are better represented at Sikhanyisweni Shelter than at any other site in the Thukela Basin, especially in Layers 4–6 where they comprise 18 % of the MNIs. Attention should also be drawn to the fact that the only hippopotamus recovered from the Thukela Basin LSA excavations was recovered from Layer 2 at this site.

Six *Unio caffer* (fresh-water mussel) and two unidentifiable mussels were recovered from Layer 1 and, as mentioned earlier, three *Nassarius kraussianus* shells were also recovered from this layer.

PLANT REMAINS

Plant remains were recovered from Layers 1–3 and 5 but they were mostly recovered from Layers 1 and 2. The pieces of unworked wood, twigs and bark recovered were weighed, and their masses in Layers 1–3 were 13,6, 15,8 and 3,5 grams respectively. The results of a seed analysis are presented in Table 11. It is clear, firstly, that Layer 1 contains most of the seeds, in fact 84 % of them; and,

TABLE 11

Sikhanyisweni shelter: seed assemblage.

	Layer 1		2		3		5	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Acacia karroo	160	65,84	16	41,03	—	—	—	—
A. nilotica	—	—	1	2,56	—	—	—	—
A. sieberana var. *woodii*	45	18,52	16	41,03	—	—	—	—
Apodytes dimidiata	1	0,41	1	2,56	—	—	—	—
Asteraceae cf. *Osteaospernum*	1	0,41	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cissus cf. *cussonioides*	1	0,41	—	—	—	—	—	—
Citrullus lanatus	11	4,53	—	—	2	66,67	—	—
Cussonia sp.	4	1,65	1	2,56	—	—	—	—
Diospyros lycoides	1	0,41	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diospyros whyteana	5	2,06	—	—	—	—	—	—
Euclea crispa	1	0,41	—	—	—	—	—	—
Myria serrata	1	0,41	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pavetta sp.	1	0,41	1	2,56	—	—	—	—
Podocarpus latifolus	3	1,23	—	—	—	—	—	—
cf. *Rawsonia lucida*	—	—	1	2,56	—	—	—	—
cf. *Smilax* sp.	4	1,64	—	—	—	—	—	—
Adiagnostic	4	1,64	2	5,13	1	33,33	6	100,00
Total	243		39		3		6	

TABLE 12

Sikhanyisweni shelter: human uses of plants identified. Information from Fox & Norwood Young (1982) and Watt & Breyer-Brandwijk (1962).

	Fruit/Seed	Medicinal	Spinach	Beverage	Other details
Acacia karroo	—	—	—	x	Gum
A. nilotica	—	x	—	—	Tanning
A. sieberana var. *woodii*	—	x	—	—	—
Apodytes dimidiata	—	x	x	—	—
Asteraceae cf. *Osteospernum*	—	—	—	—	—
Cissus cf. *cussonioides*	—	—	—	—	—
Citrullus lanatus	x	—	—	—	Cultivated melon
Cussonia sp.	x	—	—	—	Tubers eaten raw
Diospyros lycoides	x	—	—	—	Roots chewed
Diospyros whyteana	x	—	—	x	—
Euclea crispa	x	x	—	—	Oil
Myrica serrata	x	x	—	—	—
Pavetta sp.	—	—	x	—	—
Podocarpus latifolus	x	—	—	—	—
cf. *Rawsonia lucida*	x	—	—	—	—
cf. *Smilax* sp.	—	—	—	—	—

secondly, that most of the seeds in the upper two layers are *Acacia*. Indeed, in Layers 1 and 2 *Acacia* seeds comprise 84 % and 85 % respectively. They are followed in abundance by *Citrullus lanatus*, which are under 5 % of the seeds in Layer 1 and are the only seeds identified in Layer 3. It is likely, however, that the Layer 3 *C. lanatus* seeds were introduced from one of the overlying layers, as it is a cultivated plant presumably associated with the ephemeral post-2000 BP occu-

pation. Other than these types, a wide range have been identified, but they occur in negligible quantities.

The known human usage of the plants identified is presented in Table 12. Half of these plants have edible fruits, about a third have medicinal properties, and some can be used as a spinach or a beverage.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Sikhanyisweni Shelter's importance lies mainly in that, firstly, it is the only site to have produced unequivocal evidence of the very early Holocene hunter–gatherer occupation of the Thukela Basin; and, secondly, it is instrumental in illuminating the structural development of Thukela Basin hunter–gatherer society. Considering first the early occupation of this site, it is of interest that Layers 4 and 5, which date to around 10000 BP, produced comparatively higher CCS proportions than the overlying layers. CCS, which erodes out of the Drakensberg basalts, does not occur naturally north of the Thukela River, but only in the Thukela River itself and to the south. This leads me to conclude that the site's occupants, at this time, had greater contact with others in the area to the south than later occupants. This supports my argument that during the early Holocene hunter–gatherer occupation of the Thukela Basin, people had more wide-ranging contacts than between then and 2000 BP (Mazel 1987 1988).

The big proportion of large and medium-large bovids and especially zebra in Layers 4–6, which combined comprise roughly 40 % of the MNIs, is interesting. Besides two of the Diamond 1 macrofaunal assemblages, it is the only excavated Thukela Basin hunter–gatherer faunal assemblage in which such heavy emphasis has been placed on large bovids and zebra. Future excavations in this region will hopefully reveal whether this phenomenon also typifies other 10000–7000 BP macrofaunal assemblages or whether it is restricted to this site.

I have proposed that the Thukela Basin hunter–gatherers experienced a process of economic intensification (Mazel 1987 1988). While the evidence for this phenomenon is not as strong at Sikhanyisweni Shelter as at other sites (primarily, I believe, because of poor organic preservation) some pointers to this are present. Among the macrofauna, there is, as at most other sites, an increased emphasis on small ground game such as dassies and hares, if we compare Layers 1 and 2 with Layer 3. The increasing proportion of adzes is probably related to the increased manufacture and maintenance of digging-sticks and this, in turn, suggests an increased exploitation of underground plant foods (Mazel 1987 1988, Mazel & Parkington 1981). However, to obtain a better understanding of the economic intensification experienced by the Sikhanyisweni Shelter hunter–gatherers, it is essential that a site with good organic preservation be excavated close by.

While the Sikhanyisweni Shelter excavation has provided evidence for the very early Holocene occupation of the Thukela Basin, the absence of deposits dating back to this period at other sites suggests that the hunter–gatherer inhabitation of this area may have been ephemeral until around 7000 BP. Thereafter, there is a significant increase in human occupation. During the period 7000–2000 BP three phases of social structural development are discernible (Mazel 1987 1988). In the first phase, which dates to the initial period of intensive hunter–gatherer occupa-

tion of the research area, strong uniformity typified material cultural assemblages from across the Thukela Basin. This has led me to argue (Mazel 1987 1988) that during this period there was a single, large alliance (mating) network which covered most of the upper Thukela Catchment, except perhaps the lower regions. Thereafter this alliance network disintegrated, and by 4000 BP three networks had appeared in the area covered by the initial network. These alliance mating networks have been defined as dialectically, socially and economically distinct groups of bands integrated through a dynamic network of social interaction into a cohesive social unit which is able to reproduce itself biologically and socially (Mazel 1987). Moreover, as Wobst (1974) argued, networks of this nature probably constitute the highest level of social integration among hunter–gatherers. Differences between groups of hunter–gatherer bands are likely to be expressed in the types of material culture they carry and distribute as well as the idiosyncratic style applied to items common to different groups (Clark, G. 1975, Clarke, D. L. 1968, Deacon, J. 1986, Mazel 1987).

I have proposed that one of the 4000–2000 BP alliance networks covered the area to the south of the Thukela River incorporating Diamond 1, Clarke's Shelter and Main Cave and that the other two were to the north of the river, one of which covered the area in the proximity of Nkupe Shelter and Mgede Shelter and the other Sikhanyisweni Shelter and Nqutu Shelter (Davies 1952) (Mazel 1987). Although Nkupe Shelter and Sikhanyisweni Shelter display greater similarity to each other than either do with sites to the south, I believe that they are sufficiently diverse not to consider them different stations within the same alliance network.

The differences between Sikhanyisweni Shelter and the sites south of the Thukela River between 4000–2000 BP, are clear. They are, for example, the absence in the latter of OES and beads, ground stones and segments (except for one specimen from the early Diamond 1 deposits), the extremely low worked bone and ochre densities or absence of worked bone in the southern sites as well as contrasting backed scraper assemblages. Sikhanyisweni Shelter is the only site in the Thukela Basin whose 4000–2000 BP backed scrapers are dominated by Type 3 backed scrapers (ie. backed along two laterals perpendicular to the working edge).

Considering the Nkupe Shelter and Sikhanyisweni Shelter differences, the OES piece densities (ie. frequency per volume of deposit) at the latter site are much greater (Mazel 1987 Fig. 5: 14). Moreover, the only evidence of OES bead manufacture in the Thukela Basin comes from Sikhanyisweni Shelter, Layer 1. This fact assumes added significance when considering that the Bleek & Lloyd northern Cape hunter–gatherer informants in the late nineteenth century commented that only one group in their general area made and bartered OES beads (Deacon, J. 1986).

The Sikhanyisweni Shelter 4000–2000 BP scrapers and adzes are larger than their Nkupe Shelter counterparts (Fig. 17). Sikhanyisweni Shelter also produced significantly greater ochre and ground stone densities, but the former may relate to the abundant local availability of ochre. Their backed piece and backed scraper assemblages are also different. At Nkupe Shelter segments are the most common

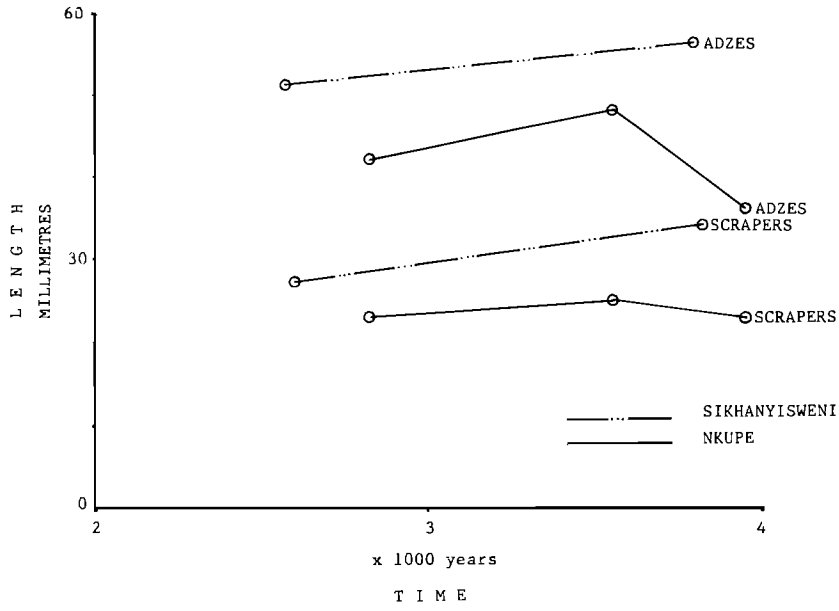

Fig. 17. Comparison of Nkupe Shelter and Sikhanyisweni Shelter mean adze and scraper lengths between 2000–4000 BP.

diagnostic backed pieces, whilst at Sikhanyisweni Shelter they do occur but are less prevalent than backed blades and points. Type 3 backed scrapers dominate the Sikhanyisweni Shelter assemblages but at Nkupe Shelter Type 2 backed scrapers (ie. backed along one lateral perpendicular to the working edge) are prevalent.

That Sikhanyisweni Shelter was occupied after 2000 BP is evidenced by the presence in Layer 1 of pottery and, I would argue, other cultural items such as the piece of soapstone, the OES bead with wear lines running from the aperture to the perimeter, and the *Nassarius kraussianus* shells. The latter items do not occur in deposits predating 2000 BP in the Thukela Basin, and the earliest date for pottery is around 2000 BP in the Drakensberg. However, as it was submitted earlier, the post-2000 BP occupation at this site was probably ephemeral in nature, and with the existing evidence it is not possible to elaborate on the nature of the hunter–gatherer occupation of Sikhanyisweni Shelter or the surrounding area during this period.

In conclusion, what needs to be stressed is the need for more rock shelter excavations in the Thukela Basin in general and in the vicinity of Sikhanyisweni Shelter in particular. This is important to check on the conclusions already reached, to modify them where necessary, and to continue deepening our knowledge of the Thukela Basin hunter–gatherer past.

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